

Central Union Mission
624 Indiana Ave., NW
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-511

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313-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This seven-story building stands on an irregularly shaped lot that extends through the mid-section of Square 459, and has frontage on both C Street and Indiana Avenue. The building is made up of two wings which parallel the north and south property lines. Both wings are joined by a link on the west and which is used to house the vertical circulation core. Thus there is an interior courtyard with an irregular plan.

Apparently built in two stages, the first and larger portion of the building was erected in 1924 on original Lot 7. It had facade dimensions of 58.6 on Indiana Avenue and 64/2' along C Street. At some undetermined later date, on the adjacent lot to the east, original Lot 3 (later lots 801 and 803) a one-bay addition was added to both the north and south wings, reproducing all the detailing of the then existing building which had three bays on the north wing and four on the south wing. Although the craftsmanship was excellent in integrating the new with the existing, the brick of the earlier portion on both facades has acquired a different patina that clearly sets it off from the newer masonry. As late as 1957 the plat map shows the Union Mission Building on Lot 7, and lists Lot 3 as a separate entity. The entire property is now consolidated into Lot 813. The addition dates from 1941 (cornerstone).

The structure of the building is concrete and has a regular grid that responds to the repetitive hotel-type lay-out on the interior. There are four bays (east-west) on the north wing, five on the south. On both wings, the newer bay on the east is wider than the original ones. Both north and south facades feature striated face brick with large, raked joints. The north facade is more elegantly designed, featuring a base clad in rusticated limestone with a Corinthian portico entryway in each end bay. From the third to the sixth floor, there is a coupled window in each bay. The seventh floor is treated as a classical attic and is topped by a cornice on block modillions. At this level, the coupled windows have terra-cotta surrounds. An additional window occurs between each couple. The south facade has the same vertical organization established through the use of belt courses, but without limestone facing. Except for the entryway in the westernmost bay, the first floor fenestration is blind. The seventh story presents ample full-bay wide windows, with inter-fenestration piers featuring recessed panels and decorative limestone capitals.

Windows on the two exterior facades are all double-hung wood units with one-over-one sash. Windows opening on the courtyard are metal awning sash. All openings are square-headed.

On the inside, the first floor is dedicated to offices and public rooms. There is a chapel in the south wing that projects partially into the courtyard. Above the first floor, the north and south wings have a double-loaded corridor plan. On the seventh floor, the south wing has a large meeting room. In the west link between the two wings there are two stairs and an elevator.

Significant interior finishes include marble flooring and wood paneling in the public rooms of the first floor. The north stairs are metal and of an ornate design; between the first and second floors this stair has marble treads.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFIANCE

Central Union Mission, a charitable organization, has been located on this site for over a century; thus the history of the institution is strongly tied to the site.

This straightforward building decorated with Classical details was designed by Appleton P. Clark, Jr., in 1923, and built by D. E. Nichol in 1924 (Building Permit #4102, November 8, 1924). Elegant but somewhat bland, the building mass is very large in comparison to its immediate neighbors. The volume, however, is effectively scaled down by its overall articulation into stacking components.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

North Facade: There are four bays on the seven-story Indiana Avenue elevation. The easternmost, more recent bay is slightly wider than the rest. The facade is articulated into a two story base, a four-story mid-section and a one story classical attic. The base is clad in limestone. There is a plinth that rises to the first floor window sill level. Above the plinth is smooth faced rustication. The base terminates at the sill of the third floor windows in a running fret beltcourse. The two openings of the central bays are two stories high, and feature a deep reveal along their perimeters. Above each opening the rustication forms jack-arches.

Separating the first and second floors are recessed spandrel panels of the same limestone. Each spandrel has recessed paneling, and centered upon it is a raised floral patera. The two end bays contain entrances that are framed by identical Corinthian porticoes. On each side of each opening are overlaid fluted plasters. Above the opening the entablature has a very shallow architrave that allows for the oversized frieze made necessary by the memorial inscriptions on it. Above it, a simple cornice is underscored by egg and dart molding.

South Facade: This elevation is also composed of a two-story base, a four-story mid section and a classical attic level. There are five bays on this facade. On the ground level, each bay has a large blind opening (except for the entrance on the westernmost bay). The second through the sixth floors present a set of coupled windows on each bay, similar to those on the north facade. At the attic level, a single opening at each bay presents three double hung wooden sash.

The overall articulation of the facade consists of a smooth limestone beltcourse on the first floor level, an applied metal cornice at the third floor sill line; another continuous sill course on the seventh floor; and the simple roof parapet cornice.

A subtler level of articulation is accomplished through intricacies in the brick masonry, which features gauged and special-sized brick as well as some terra-cotta inserts. Ornamental work in the form of soldiers and stacked courses are used to define window bays and spandrel panels.

The seventh level, by far the most ornate, presents the brick interfenestration panels treated as coupled pilasters whose stone architraves are flanked by ornate stone ancons. Additional embellishment is provided in the masonry spandrel panel by alternating recessed and projecting stacked courses that insinuate a balustrade. The facade is topped with free standing metal and neon letters saying "COME UNTO ME".